TRANSLATED FROM ORIYA

ABSURD PLAY

by J. P. Das

A WRITERS WORKSHOP BOOK

ABSURD PLAY

J. P. Das

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ABSURD PLAY

J. P. Das

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL ORIYA

A
Writers
Workshop
Publication

J. P. DAS

Dr. Jagannath Prasad Das, poet, playwright and short-story writer, was born in Orissa in 1936 and was educated in the Universities of Utkal and Allahabad. His publications in English include *First Person*, *Love is a Season*, *Timescapes*, all collections of poems; *Before the Sunset*, and *The Underdog* and *Two Plays*, plays; *The Magic Deer* and *The Forbidden Street*, collections of short stories. The plays have been widely translated into various Indian languages and performed on stage and radio and television and have received critical acclaim. *Before the Sunset* is considered a classic in Indian drama. A Homi Bhabha Fellow with a doctorate in Art History, scholarly works on Orissan art include *Puri Paintings* and *Chitra-pothi*. He gave up a successful career in the Indian Administrative Service to devote himself to full-time research and creative writing. He was a Consultant to the Festival of India in the USA and France 1985-86 and has served on the Jury for national and international film festivals. A Member of the Executive Council of the Children's Film Society, India, he has edited a book on *Films for Children*. He works and lives in New Delhi.

DEDICATION

for

RAJINDER PAUL

"If only you kept on good terms with time," said the Mad Hatter, "he'd do almost anything you liked with the clock."

Alice in Wonderland

Act One

(*When lights come, one sees a bare stage with a few stools scattered about. The old man*—OM—*moves about, sitting for a while on a stool and moving away again, as if unhappy with the seat. He now shuts his eyes and appears to be meditating. A good deal of time passes. The old man is now sleeping.*

A *middle aged man*—MAM—*comes. He sits next to* OM. *Checks up whether* OM *is alive or dead. He speaks out to him loudly.*)

MAM

Excuse me, Sir.

(OM *does not reply.* MAM *repeats his question a little louder.* OM *is silent.* MAM *places his watch near* OM'*s ears.* OM *now gets up with a start.*)

OM

What time is it now ?

MAN

Twentyfive minutes.

OM

Twentyfive minutes past which hour ?

MAM

How can I say ? My watch does not have the hour hand.

OM

How do you find out the time then ?

MAM

Finding out the minutes only is fine for me. Like for some people knowing the hour is enough. When you ask for the time some would say, twenty five minutes past four. No one says, it is twentyfive minutes past four o'clock on the seventeenth day of the month of August in the year nineteen hundred and seventynine. Certain things are said, the rest are understood. Even if my watch had an hour hand, how would you know if it was the time of the day or the night ?

OM

But then what time is it now ?

MAM

Twenty-five minutes and thirty seconds.

OM

But you said just now . . . .

MAM

Thirty-one seconds.

OM

That means . . .

MAM

Thirty-two seconds.

OM

Oh, no. I meant . . .

MAM

Thirty-three seconds.

OM

I mean to say . . .

MAM

Thirty-four seconds.

OM

You can't be . . .

MAM

Thirty-four seconds.

OM

How can that be ?

MAM

Thirty-four seconds; thirty-four seconds. Because my watch has stopped ! (*The clock strikes outside.*)

OM

How will you know the time then ?

MAM

Why is it necessary to know the time ? (*They are busy talking and miss the chiming of the clock. The clock, however, keeps chiming for some time after they have stopped talking.*)

OM

If you don't need to know the time, why do you carry a watch ? Now look at me. I am very conscious of time and that is why I do not carry a watch.

MAM

If you are so particular about time, then tell me what hour the clock now struck outside.

OM

I didn't pay attention. But even if I had, it would not have helped. As your watch has no hour hand, the clock has no chime to tell about the minutes.

MAM

You are a strange fellow, indeed. You carry no watch, but want to know about the time. This is like having your legs in two boats. Or else, hunting with the hounds and running with the rabbits.

OM

You don't understand me. I don't want to know about fixed time or current time. I want to know about absolute time—because the phenomena of electrodynamics as well as of mechanics possess no properties corresponding to the idea of absolute rest.

MAM

I don't think I got you right. Could you please repeat ?

(OM, *however, shuts his eyes and goes off to sleep.* MAM *hovers around him for some time and then goes over and sits on a stool a little away from him. A girl, let's call her* G-I, *comes inside.*)

G-I

(*to* MAM) When will the train come ?

MAM

What train ?

G-I

Aren't you waiting for the train ?

MAM

No. I was simply taking a walk. I didn't even know that this is a railway station.

G-I

Did you meet anyone else here ?

MAM

Was someone expected ?

G-I

Yes. (*Looks at her watch*) He should have been here by now. (*Whispers to* MAM) We are eloping.

MAM

Where will you go to ?

G-I

Don't know. We have simply decided to get on the train and get off wherever we feel like. But he should have come quite some time back.

MAM

(*Points at* OM) Is that your man ? (G-I *goes over and closely looks at the sleeping old man.*)

G-I

Could have been. But he has no sense of time. Has come forty years too late.

MAM

What will you do now ?

G-I

I'll wait. I only hope the train does not arrive before he does.

MAM

If you don't mind . . .

G-I

No, thank you. I want to have a little quiet now.

MAM

I only wanted to know who you are, who that other man is and . . .

G-I

That' something personal.
(*She walks away and sits at a distance.*)

MAM

(*to himself*) It looks as if my work will not get done. If one is mad, the other refuses to talk.

(*A young man*—YM—*comes. He looks hesitant and a little scared. He looks about him and stands as if not knowing what to do.* MAM *goes to G-I and whispers*)

MAM

He has come.

G-I

Who has come ?
(MAM *points at the young man.*)

G-I

No, he is not my man.
(*She takes out a photograph from her purse and compares.*)
No, he is not my man at all. Please do not bother me now.
(G-I *starts reading a book.* MAM *comes away from the girl and goes near the young man.*)

MAM

So what brings you here ?

AM

Sixty per minute.

MAM

(*to himself*) That's strange ! Everyone is talking about time. Is this a watch repair shop ?
(*Another person enters now. He has a mask on his face, a mask shaped like the face of a clock, except that the dial has no hands. Let's call him clockface or simply* CLOCK.)

CLOCK

Is it the right place ?

MAM

Yes, it is. The repair-man is sleeping over there. (*Points at* OM)

(CLOCK *goes and wakes up* OM. OM *gets np with a start and looks at his face. Standing at a distance* MAM *tries to overhear their conversation.*)

OM

No, I don't understand it even now.

CLOCK

What's that again ?

OM

Time. What is time. How is it that a moment of Brahma's life is sixty thousand years on the earth? But why should I be talking to you about this ? You are a big zero; a cipher. Like your face. Someone has the minute hand and someone has the chime. But you have neither. You have only a mask.

CLOCK

You mean this is not your house ?

OM

I am waiting.

CLOCK

Since how long ? For whom ?

OM

How do I know ? What do I know of time ? And then, how will he come unless it is time for him to come ?

CLOCK

Who will come ?

OM

Unless he comes and I see him, how do I know who it is ? That is why I am keen to know the correct time.

CLOCK

In that case, I think I have come to the wrong place.

OM

It is quite possible that this is the right place, but you have come at the wrong time. Either before time . . .

CLOCK

Does it mean that the party has not started ?

OM

Or after time.

CLOCK

Does it mean that the party is over ?

OM

So long as you are not in the party, how does it matter if you are early or late ? (OM *goes to his seat, lies down and goes off to sleep.*)

YM

(*to* MAM) Excuse me, Sir, may I bother you for a minute ?

MAM

What is it now ? Sixty minutes per second, isn't it ?

YM

No, Sir, it's sixty words.

MAM

How do you mean ? A minute has sixty words and not sixty seconds ?

YM

That's right, Sir. Sixty words per minute. A word a second. (*It strikes seven outside.*)

MAM

It struck seven. Does it mean seven seconds or seven words ?

CLOCK

May be the party is over.

YM

Excuse me, Sir, but I only wanted to say that I can type sixty words a minute. (*It strikes one.*)

CLOCK

(*anxious*) It is getting late every minute. (*To* MAM) Are you sure that this is not the fancy dress party ?

MAM

Do we look like people in fancy dress ?

CLOCK

Why not ? You look like a modern day middlee aged man, but you may be the magic deer from the *Ramayana*. You are in the fancy dress of a middle-aged man.

MAM

(*pointing to* YM) And him ?

YM

Let me introduce myself. I am in reality a robot from an American science-fiction film. I am here in answer to an advertisement in the newspaper, in the garb of an unemployed

young man who has done a shorthand-typing-secretarial course and can type sixty words a minute.

MAM

(*to* CLOCK) And pray, what is your disguise ?

CLOCK

(*whispers*) Shh! Don't tell anyone that I have come disguised as Time.

MAM

How can that be ? You don't even wear a wristwatch !

CLOCK

That's the real secret. What fun is a disguise otherwise ? Please, Sir, look at yourself. Who can say that you are a golden deer ? You have changed your voice too with your disguise. Though you are now seated, I know that you can easily stand up on your two legs and start walking like a man. And looking at you, no one—not even Ravana himself —can know who you really are !
(*When he is talking*, YM *is taking notes.* CLOCK *looks at him now.*
And this young man . . .

YM

Yes, sir. The last line : though you are now seated, comma, I know that you can easily stand up on your two legs and start walking like a man, full stop. And looking at you, comma, no one, dash, not even Ravana himself, dash, can know who you really are, exclamation mark.

CLOCK

You know nothing.

YM

I know everything, Sir. You, Sir, are my provider. You

are the one who put in the ad. All this was a test for me. But I am sure, Sir, that I have noted down everything correctly.

(YM *gets a hold on* CLOCK's *feet.* CLOCK *tries to pull out, but* YM *holds faster. Seeing no way out . . .*)

CLOCK

All right. Take down now . . .

(YM *leaves him and opens his note book to write. In the meantime*, CLOCK *runs out.*)

MAM

You let him go ?

YM

I know, my lord and master. It is you who was taking my test. You are my provider. You know everything, Sir.

MAM

I know nothing. I do not even know why in a pack of cards the king of diamonds, the jack of hearts and the jack of spades have one eye each when all others have two !

YM

I know, Sir.

MAM

No, I am no magic deer. Bat we can come to some terms. As a matter of fact I need a secretary as much as you need a provider. Can you handle everything right ?

YM

You've seen proof of it already.

MAM

All right. Take down now. (*Dictates slowly*) The phenomena of . . .

(YM *does not write.* MAM *waits for him to write.*)

YM

Please continue, Sir.

MAM

Please read out what you have written.

YM

The phenomena of electrodynamics as well as of mechanics possess no properties corresponding to the idea of absolute rest.

MAM

All right. All right. That'll do. I wanted someone like you. Come closer.
(YM *comes and sits near him.*)
After having seen you, I am hopeful of completing the work in six months.

YM

(*Takes out a card from his pocket and having a close look at it*) Which means we have to finish it by the Seventeenth February, Sunday.

MAM

What is that ?

YM

That is an eternal calendar. You can find out any date from 1752 A.D. from this calendar.

MAM

I employ you from this very minute. I am sure you'll be a great help to me. Who do you think I am ?

YM

Whatever else you may be, I am certain you are a playwright.

MAM

(*surprised*) How did you guess ?

YM

The seriousness with which you quoted Einstein convinced me that the quotation had made a tremendous appeal to you and that you were going to use it in your next play.

MAM

You are right. I am a playwright. I am going to write a new play in six months' time.

YM

What will be the subject of the play ?

MAM

It will be about a playwright who is on the lookout for a suitable plot to write a play, and wandering about, has finally landed himself in a strange place.

YM

I follow you perfectly, Sir.

MAM

When the playwright, who is a middleaged man and whom we may call MAM in the play, arrives, he finds only an old man sitting there. Now start taking down. Act One. Within brackets. When lights come, one sees a bare stage with a few stools scattered about. The old man—OM—moves about, sitting for a while on a stool and moving away again as if unhappy with the seat. He now shuts his eyes and appears to be meditating. A good deal of time passes. The old man is now sleeping. A middleaged man—MAM—comes. He sits next to OM. Checks up whether OM is alive or dead. He speaks out to him loudly. Bracket closed. MAM : Excuse me, sir. Within brackets : OM does not reply. MAM repeats his question a little louder. OM is silent. MAM places his

watch near OM's ears. OM now gets up with a start. Bracket closed. OM : What time is it now ? MAM : Twentyfive minutes. Did you take down all that correctly ? Now read out what you have written down.

YM

Let me read out the last portion only. Within brackets. YM opens his notebook to take dictation. In the meantime, CLOCK runs out. Bracket closed. MAM : You let him go, question mark. YM: I know, comma, my lord and master, full stop. It is you who was taking my test, full stop. You are my provider, full stop. You know everything, comma, sir, full stop. MAM I know nothing, full stop. I do not even know why in a pack of cards the king of diamonds, comma, the jack of hearts and the jack of spades have one eye each when all the others have two, exclamation mark. YM: I know, comma, sir, full stop. MAM No, comma, I am no magic deer, full stop. But we can come to some terms, full stop. As a matter of fact I need a secretary as much as you need a provider, full stop. Can you handle everything right, question mark.

MAM

That is perfect. You fully understand what I want. Your job is to write down correctly what the playwright is seeing, that is, what I am seeing.

YM

But that won't solve your problem. Even if I write down all that has happened so far, the last portion will be : MAM gives dictation to YM. There will be nothing to write thereafter. And having written all that, the script will have a running time of not more than ten minutes.

MAM

You are right. What would you suggest then ?

YM

We have to create events. We have to create a story out of the characters who come here.

MAM

But nothing seems to be happening here. That girl over there is here for quite some time, but is sitting quiet. The old man is mad and his ramblings do not make any sense. The clock-face has also gone away.

YM

Don't you worry, Sir. Things will happen. If nothing happens on its own, I have this too. (*He brings out a pistol from his pocket and gives it to* MAM)

MAM

(*surprised and afraid*) Who are you ? Come out with the truth now. Where did you get the pistol from ?

YM

Whatever I had told you is the truth. The absolute truth. I came to you in search of a job. It is up to you to keep me with you or not.

MAM

Out with the truth. Or else I will shoot you dead.
(*Excited,* MAM *aims the pistol at* YM)

YM

It's no use. There is no bullet in the pistol.

MAM

(*relieved now*) Then it is all right. (*He puts the pistol in his pocket.*) I have complete trust in you.

YM

What a strange world ! When I told you the truth, you did not believe me, but when I told you a lie, you believed me.

At least that made you relaxed. In my relationship with you, I will try to see that you keep relaxed and never get excited.

MAM

But are there bullets in the pistol ?

YM

It depends on you. If you would not get excited if there are bullets in the pistol, then there are bullets. If you do not get relaxed unless there are no bullets in the pistol, there are no bullets.

MAM

But are there bullets in the pistol in fact, or not ?

YM

As I said, it depends on whether you are relaxed or excited. If relaxed, there are bullets ; if excited, there are no bullets.

MAM

Then it is all right.

(*When they are thus engaged in conversation, a man dressed like a policeman—let's call him* POLICE—*comes in, unseen by them, and raises his pistol to them. Now they both see him.*)

Are you excited or relaxed ?

POLICE

How does it matter ?

MAM

That will tell me if your pistol has bullets or not.

POLICE

It is there.

MAM

What is there ? Excitement, relaxation or bullet ?

POLICE

The robber is hiding here and I am going to find him out.

MAM

But there does not seem to be any robber here. As you can see, we are just a few people here—we two, the old man over there, and the girl. There is no robber here. Go and look for him elsewhere.

YM

(*to* MAM) You, Sir, will bungle everything. If the policeman goes away, everything will become quiet again. What will you do with the old man and the girl ? (*To* POLICE) Well, Sir, why don't you carry out a search ? What exactly has been stolen ?

POLICE

It is not a theft. They want to hijack the plane. There was an anonymous letter. I am sure the ringleader is hiding here.
(CLOCK *comes in, looks at each of them and goes out. No one bothers about him. The clock strikes outside.* OM *wakes up with a start, runs up to* POLCE *and holds him tight. The pistol slips from his fingers.* MAM *picks up the pistol and keeps it in his pocket.*)

OM

What time is it now ?

POLICE

It is fourteen. But where is my pistol ? (MAM *is running away.* POLICE *catches him.*) I have got you this time. Yor are the ringleader. Take out the pistol and the bomb.

MAM

There is no bomb. Only two pistols. (*He aims both pistols*) Why don't you take back your pistol ?

(POLICE *is afraid of coming near him to take the pistol.*)

POLICE

Throw it to me.

MAM

Which one is your pistol ?

OM

How many minutes past fourteen is it ?

POLICE

No minutes, please. Only fourteen. (*To* OM) But why do you want to know about time ? Are you interested to know the ETD of the plane ? But the plane will not leave until I have done a thorough search of every nook and corner. It will do you no good to know tbe time. Come out with the truth now. Where is the bomb ?

OM

No one seems to be knowing the correct time here. (OM *turns round to go.*)

POLICE

(*to* MAM) He is trying to run away. Show him the pistol. (MAM *does not bother.* OM *goes back to his seat.*)

MAM

Which one is your pistol ? The right one or the left one ?

POLICE

Whose right ? Whose left ? Yours or mine ?

MAM

Mine.

POLICE

I mean, is it your right which is my left or is it your left which is my right ?

MAM

Yours.

POLICE

I mean . . .

MAM

Let me change the pistols to avoid all confusion.

(*He takes his hands behind and shuffles the pistols.*)

Now tell me which is your pistol ? Is it the right one or the left one.

POLICE

Yes.

MAM

What is that now ? Is it yes, the right one, or is it yes, the left one ?

POLICE

No.

MAM

Is it no, not the right one, or is it no, not the left one ?

POLICE

Yes and no.

MAM

Cut out the jokes now. You don't seem to be interested in taking back the pistol. That makes me wonder if you are really a policeman !

POLICE

(*scared now*) Quiet, please. How did you know ?

(G-I *comes and asks* POLICE)

G-I

You must be the station-master.

POLICE

No, please. I am a thief. I mean I am a policeman who catches thieves. But why do you ask ?

G-I

I have gone through the timetable twice over, but there is no stoppage of any train here.

POLICE

In that case, no train will stop here.

MAM

But you were saying that the flight will take off from this airport.

POLICE

Whether train or plane or station or airport, it won't leave if it is not scheduled in the timetable.

G-I

But I'm sure he mentioned this place. (*Another girl,* G-II, *arrives, dressed exactly like* G-I. *She does not talk to them, but sits at a distance and looks at her watch.* G-I *keeps on talking, though everyone's attention is now on* G-II.) He is very punctual. One day he was thirty seconds late reaching the park. I had given him such a dressing-down that he was never late again. Why did he get late today ? (*To herself*) Could it be that I got him wrong ? Was it eight in the morning or in the night ? Or did I mix up the name of the

station ? What if he does not come ? It will be his tragedy !
(G-I *goes back to her place. Now* POLICE *goes to* G-II.)

POLICE

(*to* G-II) Are you also looking for him ?

G-II

It is a long story.

POLICE

If you don't mind . . .

G-II

But where do I start from ?

POLICE

From the very beginning. And not so loud, please. Don't you see how everyone is trying to eavesdrop ?
(G-II *starts telling something to* POLICE *in whispers.*)

MAM

(*to* YM) Do you see how the policeman is trying to impress the girl ?

YM

That's good. You'll be able to make use of that.

MAM

But we can't hear what they are saying.

YM

We can well figure out what is going on.

MAM

What do we do sitting here ?

YM

We may discuss about relativity in the meantime.

MAM

What do you know about it ?

YM

Or else I can tell you a story. It may be of some use to you sometime. It is a story of ancient times. It is from our Indian mythology. Once Vishnu, being pleased with Narada's prayers and penance, granted him a boon.

(At this time, three persons peep in. The old man asks ; May I have a bottle of rejuvenation tablets ? The old woman asks : Is the Judge in ? And the short thin young man, whom we may call Lad, asks : May I come in ?)

MAM

Drive them out. Drive them out.

YM

No, no. They are all the better for us. We have got more characters for our play.

MAM

But I can't handle so many characters. Every playwright has a repertory in his head. For instance, Shakespeare uses a cast of about twenty characters in his plays; Tennessee Williams five or six. Beckett uses only one, or if it is two, one is a reflection of the other. As for myself, I am a playwright who can handle not more than five or six characters. How many do we have now ?

YM

Old man, girl one, policeman, girl two. That makes only four. Which means we can easily accommodate these three.

MAM

What about clock-face ?

YM

In that case you will have to include the two of us also.

MAM

That's right. I had forgotten about us. We are full and cannot take anyone else.

(*The three repeat their questions*: *May I have a bottle of rejuvenation tablets ? Is the Judge in ? May I come in ?*)

YM

Let's then ask them to go away.

(*He goes and stands before the three*)

OLD MAN

Have you got a bottle of rejuvenation tablets ?

YM

Out of stock.

OLD WOMAN

Is the Judge in ?

YM

Out of station.

LAD

May I come in ?

YM

(YM *comes back. Old man and old woman leave. Lad does not go.*)

YM

As I was saying, Vishnu was pleased with Narada's prayers and penance and offered him a boon.

MAM

(*not listening to him*) What did they take this for ? A chemist's shop or a court ? What does the lad want ?

(*Lad again says*: *May I come in ?* YM *goes to him and shouts*: *Out. Get out. Lad leaves and* YM *comes bqck to* MAM.)

YM

To continue my story, Narada said, Please explain to me what is Maya. This is the boon I am asking for. Are you listening to me, Sir ?

MAM

Yes. But do you think the place looks like a chemist's shop ? Do we look like patients ?

YM

Vishnu said, So be it, and asked Narada to follow him.

MAM

If you had been given a boon, what would you have asked for ? Rejuvenation tablets, justice or merely permission to come in ?

YM

I find you are a very fickle and restless person. Do listen to me carefully. Or if your mind is straying, I know how to handle it. Please take the notebook and write down what I say. That way you cannot be unmindful.

(*He gives* MAM *his notebook and starts talking as if giving a dictation.* MAM *starts writing.*)

Vishnu and Narada kept walking and finally reached a desert. Vishnu became thirsty and asked Narada to go to the village and fetch a glass of water. Narada went to the village and knocked on the door of a house. The door was opened by a very beautiful girl. Seeing this beautiful girl, Narada forgot why he had gone there. The girl's parents welcomed Narada and requested him to stay with them. Narada stayed in their house and in course of time married the girl. He devoted himself to cultivation of the land and became a family man. He had three children now. In the meantime, twelve years passed and there was a devastating flood in the village. Narada wanted to cross the flooded river and go to a safe

place. He put the youngest child on his shoulder and, taking his wife and the other two children by the hand, he started crossing the river. The young child fell from his shoulders and, trying to save him, he let go the other children. His wife and the three children were carried by the stream and drowned. Narada himself slipped and fell and became unconscious, floating on the water. When he came to his senses, he found himself on a stone surface. He remembered his wife and children and started crying. Suddenly he heard a familiar voice saying, "Where is my water, my son ? I have been waiting for an hour." Narada opened his eyes wide and saw that there was no sign of flood. The desert was shining in bright sunlight. Vishnu said, "Do you now understand what *maya* is ?"

MAM

(*closes his notebook*) Yes, I understand. Bul I still do not understand why they had come.

YM

You may use this story in the mouth of one of the characters.

MAM

Listening to your irrelevant story, we have forgotten our original story line. The policeman is still going on talking to the girl, but we do not know what it is all about.

YM

Please don't worry. I know what is going on there. Girl Two told the policeman, I loved him very dearly. And we decided to run away, take the train and get off wherever our fancy carried us.

MAM

What did the policeman say ?

YM

Policeman said, Yes, I know that. But you did a mistake by

trusting him. That fellow is unfit for you. He will not come.

MAM

What did the girl say ?

YM

Girl Two said, You are lying.

MAM

What did the policeman say ?

YM

Policeman said, All right. Remember my words. I'll take a bet with you. He won't come during the next two hours.

MAM

(*looks at* POLICE *and* G-II) They are silent now.

YM

I know. We have now to wait for two hours, the time given by the policeman.

MAM

They have been talking for so long. You finished their dialogue in a minute.

YM

Haven't you heard of relativity ? If you are sitting near a beautiful girl, two hours feel like two minutes.

MAM

(*seeing the police come towards them*) Look, the policeman is coming this side. Should we stay or run away?

YM

Leave everything to me.
(G-I *also comes to them.*)

POLICE

Didn't I tell you the truth ? It did not take even a few minutes to realise the truth.

G-I

I realised that it was an old time-table.

POLICE

But the basic question is : Does the train stop because it is written down in the time-table, or is it written down in the time-table because the train stops ? We must find out that first.

G-II

For me the basic question is whether he will come or not.

POLICE

That's right. There is a basic question to everything. (*He takes out a piece of paper from his pocket.*) I found this piece of paper in my pocket the other day. It says only : Sorry, next year. For me the basic question is : Who wrote this, which is the next year, and what will happen then ? (*The old man and the old woman appear and repeat their questions. May I have a bottle of rejuvenation tablets ? Is the Judge in ?* YM *goes up to them and says*)

YM

(*to old man*) No, Sir. (*To old woman*) Not in. And if you come across that lad, tell him that the answer is no, a plain and simple no. (*Old man and old woman leave.* G-I *comes in.*)

G-II

(*to policeman*) May I borrow your time-table ? (*Police gives the piece of paper to* G-II, *who reads it and passes it on to* G-I *who reads it and returns it to policeman. They go back.*)

POLICE

Now I know that the two girls are one and the same. One is a mirror-image of the other.

MAM

Who is whose image ? Who is the original, who is the image ?

POLICE

Both are images. Or rather, each one is an image of an image.

MAM

Is the man they are looking for also an image ?

YM

That is nice. The play could be called *Two Images in Search of an Image.*

MAM

But I had thought of *A Playwright in Search of Six Characters.*

YM

(*to* POLICE) What do you suggest ?

POLICE

The basic question is : Would you write a play basing on a title, or would you give tbe title basing on the play ? What is the time now ?

MAM

You seem to be interested in time like the old man. He is asking about time since he has no work, but why do you want to know about time ?

POLICE

The basic question is . . .

YM

I know what you are going to say. You'll say : The basic question is, do you need time because you have work or do you need work because you have time ?

(*The clock strikes outside.* CLOCK *comes in.*)

CLOCK

Who needs time ?

MAM

I don't. Do you, secretary ? (YM *nods his head saying no.*) And policeman, Sir, do you need time ? (*Police also says no.*) It is the old man who needs time. I find that the older one grows, the more time he needs. And Mr. Clock, Sir, when you come back after meeting the old man, ask me again. I might need some time then.

(CLOCK *goes away from them and stands first near* G-I *and then near* G-II. *They do not look at him.* CLOCK *goes to* OM *and wakes him up.* OM *gets up with a start.*)

OM

Who is that ? Who is that ?
(CLOCK *bends his head and salutes.*)
So, you are back again.

CLOCK

You want time ?

OM

Where will you get time from ? You are a big zero.

CLOCK

Everything starts from zero.

OM

Then tell me what time it is now.

CLOCK

I will tell you now.
(*The clock strikes outside, with irregular chimes.*)

OM

What time is it ?

CLOCK

You disturbed me and I could not count the hours. Perhaps it was . . .

OM

I don't want any guesses. I want the absolutely correct time. How many hours, how many minutes, how many seconds, and how many sixtieth part of seconds. Can you tell me ?

CLOCK

You bungled everything.

OM

You are a cheat. A long-winded busybody. Never again come to me.

CLOCK

You bungled everything.

OM

Go away, I say. Otherwise, I will tie you up.

CLOCK

Can you catch me ever ? Try . . .
(CLOCK *starts running and feinting.* OM *runs after him. For some time* CLOCK *stands between* G-I *and* G-II. OM *does not see him and turns back.*)

CLOCK

(*shouts*) I am here. Catch me.

(OM *runs after him, but he easily evades him and runs out of the stage.* OM *goes back to sleep.*)

MAM

But what is the time ?

YM

(*Takes out the calendar from his pocket*)
Thirtieth April will be a Sunday.

MAM

So what ?

YM

You can know everything from this eternal calendar. For instance, you can know that twenty-ninth April will be a Saturday and thirty-first April a Monday.

MAM

But the question is *now*. What hour is it now ?

POLICE

So you want to know the time. All right ? Now see . . .
(*He blows on his whistle. Everyone waits as if something is going to happen. Nothing happens for a couple of minutes. Angry,* POLICE *blows on his whistle twice more. Everyone waits, but nothing happens.* POLICE *looks at his whistle angirly.*)

YM

Everyone has failed. No one knows anything about time. (*To* MAM) Would you please read out that quotation about time ?

MAM

(*reads out from his note-book*) The passage of time is merely a feature of our consciousness and has no objective physical significance. Thus past, present and future have the value of

mere illusion. Einstein said that.

YM

Now we understand everything.

MAM

Shall I read some more ?

YM

Please.

MAM

St. Augustine said : There are three times—a present of things past, a present of things present, and a present of things future.

YM

Wonderful. Everything is crystal clear now. No one can have any doubts about time.
(POLICE *blows his whistle again.* LAD *comes and asks : May I come in* ? POLICE *looks at his whistle with great satisfaction.*)

MAM

(*to* YM) Should we call him in ?

YM

Yes, we should. We are already short of one character.

MAM

Did the old man pop off ?

YM

No. But we know that the two girls are one and the same.

MAM

(*goes to* LAD) Please come in, Sir. Please do.
(POLICE *goes up and looks at* LAD's *face with great satisfaction.*)

YM

(*to* LAD) What do you know about all this, Sir ?

LAD

(*whispers*) Hickory, Dickory, Dock.

MAM

I can't hear you.

LAD

(*shouts*) Hickory Dickory Dock.
(*The old man wakes up with a start.* G-I *and* G-II *come and* hold LAD *by his hands. The light fades.*)

G-I & G-II

We've got him. We've got him.

POLICE

Didn't I tell you he would come within two hours ?

G-I

But this one looks darker.

G-I

Also shorter.

G-I

His nose is smaller.

G-II

His ears larger.

G-I

Hair too thin.

G-II

Lips too thick.

G-I

Weighs more.

G-II

Sees less.

O-I & G-II

But he will do. (*To* LAD) Let's go.
(*The girls were circling* LAD *and examining him all this time. Now they hold his hands and pull him.* LAD *looks at them helpless. The light becomes dimmer.*)

G-I

He does not seem to be willing to go. (*To* LAD) What do you want ?

LAD

Hickory.

G-II

We won't leave you.

LAD

Dickory.

G-I

Come with us quietly. Or else, we will tie you up.

LAD

Dock.

G-II

No tricks now. The moment the train comes, we take you and go.
(*The girls pull him.* LAD *sulks and whines.*)

POLICE

(*to* LAD) Why are you teasing the girls ?

LAD

(*mumbles*) Hickory Dickory Dock.

POLICE

What are you people doing ? This fellow is kidnapping the girls and you are keeping quiet. Police, Police ! . . . (*The girls tug at* LAD *who whines louder. The light becomes dimmer still.*) (*To* LAD) Leave tbe girls alone. Or else, or else . . . (OM *comes and joins them. They are all now standing surrounding the Lad and the girls.*) Leave them, I say. Or else I will shoot you. (MAM *takes out the pistol from his pocket. It is quite dark now. The clock strikes.*) I will count up to three. If you don't leave them alone . . . one . . . (*He blows the whistle*) *Two* . . . (*He blows again*) Three . . . (POLICE *blows a long whistle.* CLOCK *runs into their midst. The pistol goes off in the dark. When the light brightens, they are standing in two rows with their faces towards the back of the stage. In the centre lies* CLOCK, *dead as a doorknob. The stage becomes dark.*)

Act Two

(When lights come, one finds the stage as before. Clockface gets up slowly and takes out the mask from his face. One is surprised to find that it was YM *under the mask !)*

YM

(gets up and stands erect) How did you like my acting ?

MAM

Are you really an actor ?

YM

No, I am a critic. But every review that I do is a bit of acting.

MAM

What about being my secretary ?

YM

That was acting too. Everything is acting. That old man is acting as if asleep, but is keeping an eye on everything going on here. The thief is acting the policeman. The girl is doing a double role. A dead man is playing the clock. Do you know what you are acting ?

MAM

I am a playwright.

YM

I know. You are a conventional playwright but trying to act like a modern playwright writing absurd plays.

MAM

Where did I go wrong, Sir ?

YM

You are an Indian playwright ?

MAM

Yes, Sir.

YM

Have you read Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti ?

MAM

No, Sir.

YM

What have you read then ?

MAM

Ionesco, Adamov, Genet, Beckett.

YM

Who is your ideal ?

MAM

Vladimir.

YM

Vladimir who ?

MAM

Vladimir and Estrogon. As in : Estrogon—Well, shall we go ? Vladimir—Yes, let's go. Within brackets, they do not move.

YM

All right, all right. What is your new play about ?

MAM

It is about time.

YM

Do you know what the Atharva Veda has to say about time ?

MAM

Go, but . . .

YM

So you know about time which is from the Germanic root *ti* ? Time that goes with tide.

MAM

It was called *tima* in Old English and *timi* in Old Norse.

YM

What do you know about time ?

OM

For most purposes, the world gets its time from the sun, reckoning a day as the average interval of time from noon to noon. This is called "mean solar time". The time indicated by a sundial called "apparent solar time" does not as a rule agree with the "mean solar time", because the actual solar day is constantly changing in length owing to the shifting of the earth's position as it revolves. Mean solar time, when determined by local observation, is obviously the same only for places on the same meridian, because the sun travels 15 degrees of longitude every hour. In order to do away with such possibilities of confusion, the majority of civilised countries have established time zones roughly 15 degrees wide, throughout each of which the same time—known as standard time—is observed, so that the time of each belt will vary by an exact hour from those on either side. These belts are measured east and west from one centred on Greenwich Observatory.

YM

Is that all ?

MAM

No. Let me continue. Now let us follow the "time zone" system round the earth. When it is noon in Greenwich on, say, April 15, it is only 7 a.m. in Washington, USA; and in the time zone in which the Samoan islands lie it is midnight. That is, April 15 has just begun in Samoa. Going east from Greenwich at noon there, it is already 2 p.m. in Leningrad, and 5.30 p.m. in Madras. Shall I go on ?

YM

No, thank you. So you will write a play about time.

MAM

I have already started writing. Shall I read ? Act one. Within brackets. When lights come, one sees a bare stage with a few stools scattered about The old man—OM—moves about, sitting for a while on a stool and moving away again, as if unhappy with the seat. He now shuts his eyes and appears to be meditating. A good deal of time passes. The old man is now sleeping. A middleaged man—MAM—comes. He sits next to OM. Checks whether OM is alive or dead. He speaks out to him loudly. Bracket closed. MAM Excuse me, Sir.
(OM *gets up with a start.*)

OM

What time now ?

MAM

Twentyfive minutes.

OM

Twentyfive minutes past which hour ?

MAM

How can I say ? My watch does not have the hour hand.

OM

How do you find out the time then ?

MAM

Finding out the minutes only is fine for me. Like for some people knowing the hour is enough. When you ask for time, some would say, twentyfive minutes past four. No one says, it is twenty five minutes past four o'clock on the seventeenth day of the month of August in the year nineteen hundred and seventynine. Certain things are said, the rest are understood. Even if my watch had an hour hand, how would you know if it was the time of the day or the night ?

OM

But then what time is it now ?

MAM

Twentyfive minutes and thirty seconds.

OM

But you said just now . . .

MAM

Thirtyone seconds.

OM

That means . . .

MAM

Thirtytwo seconds.

OM

Oh, no, I meant . . .

MAM

Thirty-three seconds.

OM

I mean to say . . .

MAM

Thirty-four seconds.

OM

You can't be . . .

MAM

Thirty-four seconds.

OM

How can that be ?

MAM

Thirty-four seconds; thirty-four seconds. Because my watch has stopped !
(*The clock strikes outside,* CLOCK *comes in and moves about.*)

OM

What time is it now ?

MAM

Eighteen.

OM

But how many minutes past eighteen ?

MAM

I don't know. Please go away.
(OM *goes away.* CLOCK *follows him and sits near him.*)

YM

It struck fourteen. Why did you tell him eighteen ?

MAM

It does not matter. Fourteen or eighteen, all that the old man wants is a number. Well, what was I saying now ?
(POLICE, *who was listening to them, comes closer now.*)

POLICE

It was about the play you have already started writing.

YM

What happens in the end ?

MAM

The first act ends in a murder. In the second half the solution is found. The question is : Who killed time ?

POLICE

But the basic question is, where is the murder weapon ?
(MAM *takes out the pistol and gives it to* YM. YM *examines it.* POLICE *asks for the pistol but when* YM *hands it over to him, takes it not in his hand, but on a handkerchief, and puts the pistol wrapped in the handkerchief in his pocket.*)
So we have the weapon. Now for the dying declaration. The question is, what did the clock say before death ?

MAM

I have not heard anything.

POLICE

That can't be. All of you come here.
(G-I *and* G-II *come nearer.* CLOCK *goes on pacing.*)
What did he say when he fell down after being shot?

G-I

He said, I don't want *time*. (*Emphasises "time"*)

G-II

No. He said, I *don't want* time.
(*Emphasises "don't want"*)

POLICE

Who does that point to as the murderer ? If he said, I don't want *time*, then the murderer is someone, and if he said, I *don't want* time, then the murderer is someone else.

MAM

But both point to the old man only. It is the old man who was so concerned with time. The deceased talking about time is pointing his accusing finger at the old man.

POLICE

So now, we have the murder weapon. We have the dying declaration. We also have the murderer.

YM

No, sir. Though the evidence leads to the old man, the real murderer is someone else. (*The clock outside strikes.* CLOCK *goes out.*)

MAM

Yes, sir. The murderer is someone else. And that murderer is (*to* YM) you. It is your pistol. It is your fingerprint on the pistol. How can we forget that it was you who had first pulled out the pistol ?

YM

Patience, please. Please have patience. Please think of everything before you judge a person. It was not I only who had a pistol. The policeman also had a pistol. And with what finesse he took my fingerprints on the pistol ! When he took the pistol in his handkerchief, I knew who the murderer was. And then, I have my doubts if this fellow is a policeman. First he said something about catching a thief. That was only a ploy to gain entrance. After that he tried to accuse the old man. But then, truth triumphed in the end.

POLICE

Ladies and gentlemen. May I have your attention, please. I may not be a policeman. I may even be a thief. But I am no murderer. Frankly, I have been suspicious of the middleaged man from the start. This was the man who was waxing eloquent about time. And the strongest evidence against him is that he had the murder weapon on him. The murder was committed, not with the pistol which I have, but with the one in this gentleman's pocket. (*To* MAM) Out with the pistol, now!

MAM

No. No . . .

G-I

We knew that he was the murderer.

G-II

He who can split a character in two is capable of anything.

YM

What does that mean ?

G-I

It is against the tradition of theatre to show two similar characters in a play. In this play a character has been split into two and given to us. Not just that. We have been given similar dress, dialogue and character. This confuses the audience. Even the policeman was confused.

G-II

Secondly, we have hardly any role in the play. There has to be a balance between male and female characters in a play. This play does not have it. Most of the time we have just to hang around doing nothing. For instance, I have already read the timetable twice, having nothing else to do.

G-I

Thirdly, we do not have much of movement on the stage. We are made to wait for someone, who does not turn up. And so we had in the end to catch hold of the funny fellow.

G-II

Fourthly . . . (*She mimes making a speech.*)

G-I

Fifthly . . . (*Mimes talking in a more agitated manner.*)

G-II

Sixthly . . . (*Mimes a still more excited speech.*)

MAM

Patience, my dear ladies and gentlemen, have patience. I have a lot to say about the accusations made against me, but I choose to keep quiet. I am indeed unfortunate. I am unfortunate to have been born in a country where the readers are blind, the audience is illiterate, and the critics are idiots. Rather than suffer such foolishness, I consider it more respectable to confess to the murder. You will be happy to know, ladies and gentlemen, that after due deliberation, I have decided to announce that I committed the murder.

YM

That is impossible. I must take responsibility for my action. The murder is mine and mine only. I have committed it singlehanded. Or to put it differently, I have committed suicide without anyone's aid or abetment. Milord and gentlemen of the jury, you cannot hang a person for someone else's crime. It is my pistol, it is my fingerprint and, what is more, it is my corpse. It is only I who is responsible for the crime, only I. I am prepared for the severest sentence.

POLICE

May I say something in this connection, milord ?

YM

If you are particular about the dying delcaration or suicide note, I am prepared even now to record a statement that I committed the crime while in complete possession of my wits.

POLICE

Milord, I am an impostor and a liar. But I want to tell you the truth before I breathe my last. Milord, I am not a policeman. As a matter of fact, no one of our family has been in the police for seven generations. I am a great sinner. But I do not want anyone to be punished for my crime. Please punish me on my statement. Let truth triumph.
(*The clock strikes.* CLOCK *comes in, goes around, and then goes out.* YM *comes to them.*)

OM

What time is it now ?
(*No one listens to* OM. *They continue as before.*)

G-I

This only shows how two lies make one truth. Though you have all tried to arrive at a conclusion with your half-baked arguments, you have all missed a basic premise. What is it that a murder presupposes ? It presupposes a murderer. It presupposes a man to be murdered. It also presupposes a murder weapon. But more than these, a murder presupposes another important thing.

G-II

And that is the motive. You can have a murder without a murderer. You can have a murder without having to kill a man. But the thing without which no murder is possible is motive.

G-I

And therefore we have to ask . . .

OM

What time is it now ?

G-I

What is it that motivated the murder ? Who is it that gains by the murder ? Once that question is answered, catching the murderer is but child's play.

OM

But we must know the correct time too.

G-II

Motives for a murder can be of three types: for money, for woman or for fame. There are instances of murder for one or more of these reasons. There could be a murder for money and woman, or for woman and fame, or for money and fame.

G-I

The murder under our consideration is one which combines all three elements. OM to put it differently, it is a case where two and two make four.

OM

But then what can you do if you don't know what time ii is ?

MAM

It is now evident from all that the real murderers are these two girls. That is the final truth.
(*Since no one listens to* OM, *he goes away.*)

G-II

It is as true as the sun rising in the east. Or Jack and Jill going up the hill.

G-I

Or happy days are here again.

MAM

And they must be tried and suitably punished. I am willing to be the prosecutor and produce all the evidence.

YM

I am willing to be the judge. You will reall that the old woman was asking for the judge, that is me.

POLICE

For a fair trial, I would like to be the defense counsel.
(*They rearrange the seats as in a courtroom.*)

YM

Silence, silence! The court is now in session. Let the prosecution present its case.

MAM

May it please your honour. To present this serious matter, I must begin from the very beginning. You may ask, which is the beginning? According to the Book of Genesis in the Bible, God made the earth, the heavens and the planets and then formed man of the dust of the ground and placed him in the Garden of Eden. Watered by a river and abounding in trees and fruit and food, Eden was a garden of delight. Animals and birds, formed out of the ground, were added, were named by Adam, the man God had created, and lived peaceably in the Garden. Then, as a companion for Adam, woman was made from a rib taken from his side when he was in a deep sleep, and the two lived together in a state of perfect happiness and innocence.

POLICE

Objection, milord. This is a denigration of the character of woman.

YM.

There is no such thing as character of woman. Objection

overruled. You may proceed, Mr. Prosecutor.

MAM

In the garden stood the Tree of Knowledge whose fruit was forbidden to Adam and Eve. This fruit the woman Eve was tempted to eat by the serpent, more cunning than any beast of the field, and Adam also fell into temptation and ate the fruit. Then the eyes of both were opened; they lost their innocence and gained knowledge of good and evil. As a punishment for sin, or disobedience to God . . .

POLICE

Objection . . .

YM

Overruled. Please continue.

MAM

They were turned out of Eden; the serpent was cursed, the woman condemned to the pains of childbirth.

POLICE

Ob—

OM

Over—

MAM

And made subject to man and the man compelled to toil for his food from that time onwards. (*The clock strikes.* OM *wakes up with a start and comes to them.*)

OM

What time is it now ?

(*No one listens to him. He tries to listen to them for some time but gets bored and goes back to his seat.* MAM *continues his speech. However, one sees only his mouth moving without any voice coming out. He continues his mime when the clock strikes outside.*)

POLICE

Objection, milord.

YM

Objection overruled. (*To* MAM) Please continue.
(MAM *continues his mime of making a strong speech. Agitated,* POLICE *mimes a protest. The girls also join the act and, equally agitated, mime a strong statement. It appears as if there is a serious difference of opinion.*)

YM

Order. Order.

POLICE

Milord, I have no faith in this court.

YM

If doubts are cast on the fairness of the trial and the impartiality of the court, I would not like to continue as the judge.

POLICE

In that case I don't mind being the judge and conducting the trial.

MAM

But how can a party to the case sit in judgment ? Against my wishes, and only in the interest of a fair trial, I am willing to take up the responsibility.

YM

You too have been a party. What fairness can be expected from you ? How can the prosecutor be the judge ?

POLICE

In that case the choice narrows down to the girls.
(*The girls go to the Judge's seat. They rearrange the seats.*)

G-I & G-II

Order. Order.
(LAD *enters. He behaves as if he is the lord and master of the whole show.*)

LAD

Please hold on for a minute. I thlnk the microphones are not working. (*Looks at the cabin*) Tone up the sound a little. Testing. Testing. One two three four five. (*His voice comes out very loud on the speaker*) A little lower, please, Five four three two one. O. K. Now for the lights. Make it a little brighter. (*It becomes brighter*) Not so much. Dim it a bit. That's better. Now get along with the dialogue.
(LAD *goes out*.)

G-I & G-II

Order. Order.

MAM

Milord. Listening to the evidence of the prosecution witnesses and the presentation of the public prosecutor, anyone will think that there is no criminal more wicked and vile than the accused. But, milord, this is a case which stands out as an example of twisting the truth beyond recognition through falsehood. I will produce one single proof of this, which will make the case take a complete turn. That proof lies in the public prosecutor's pocket. Public prosecutor, sir, will you please come to the dock ?

POLICE

I swear that I will tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

MAM

What are you really ?

POLICE

To be truthful, I am a liar.

MAM

If you are a liar, then your statement that you are a liar is a lie. That makes you a truthful person. If you are a truthful person, then your statement that you are a liar is true. That makes you a liar. Which is the truth ? The lie is the truth or the truth is the truth ?

POLICE

Truth is lie.

MAM

If truth is lie, then what is lie ? Contrarily, if lie is truth, then what is truth ?

POLICE

Lie is truth.

G-I & G-II

Order. Order.

MAM

Let me now come to the material object. (*To* POLICE) What have got in your pocket ? (POLICE *takes out the whistle and blows on it.*) What else have you got ?

POLICE

Nothing else.

MAM

(*whispers*) That piece of paper.

POLICE

(*takes out the piece of paper*) Yes, sir, this piece of paper.

MAM

Please read out what is written.

POLICE

(*Reads*) Sorry, next year.
(*Gives the piece of paper to* MAM)

MAM

(*tries to decipher it*) Miiord, please note how witness is trying to mislead the court. The paper says, not "Sorry, next year", but "Sonny, nasty car". Let this he taken into the court's records. What other spoof is necessary ?
(LAD *enters*)

MAM

What happened now ? My dialogue is all right. Except that I said spoof instead of proof. Everything else was all right.

LAD

No, after the first court scene, everything seems confused. And there is a lot of repetition. We have to make changes.
(LAD *sits down. Others sit surrounding him.* OM *does not move and keeps sleeping.* POLICE *looks inside and calls Clock-face who comes and joins them.*)

LAD

Is everybody there ?

MAM

Except the old man.
(*The clock strikes.*)

LAD

Doesn't matter. He has nothing to do except enquire about the time. How long did it take to do the First Act ?

POLICE

The old man was keeping time. About forty minutes.

LAD

How many minutes of the Second Act have we done by now ?

POLICE

About half an hour.

LAD

Which means we need another ten-fifteen minutes of play. We have to decide about the end,

G-I

That's why I had suggested doing *The Twins*.

LAD

Thank heavens, no. Let's be done with this play first. Let me have the script. (MAM *passes on his notebook to him.*) How far have we gone ?
(MAM *points out the page.*)
Order. Order. Then there are ten pages of court scene. It will get boring. We must have a strong climactic ending as in the First Act.
(*The lights dim.*)
What follows the court scene ?
(MAM *shows him the page. Lad looks closely as it is difficult to read in the dim light.*)
This is the end of Act One.
What about the finale of the play ?

MAM

Both end in a similar manner.

LAD

How can that be ?

G-II

That's why I had suggested doing *The Twins*.

LAD

We have no time now. Let's cut out ten minutes from the court scene and do the last portion. Get back to your respective places.
(*They line up as in the end of Act One. The girls hold* LAD'*s hands and pull him.* LAD *sulks and whines.*)

POLICE

(*to* LAD) Why are you teasing the girls ?

LAD

(*mumbles*) Hickory Dickory Dock.

POLICE

What are you people doing ? This fellow is kidnapping the girls and you are keeping quiet ? Police, Police . . .
(*The girls tug at* LAD *who whines louder. The light become dimmer still.*)
(*to* LAD) Leave the girls alone. Or else, or else . . .
(OM *comes and joins them. They are all now standing, surrounding the lad and the girls.*) Leave them, I say. Or else I will shoot you.
(MAM *takes out the pistol from his pocket. It is quite dark now. The clock strikes.*) I will count up to three. If you don't leave them alone . . . One (*he blows the whistle*) . . .Two . . . (*he blows again*) Three . . .
(POLICE *blows a long whistle.* CLOCK *runs into their midst. The pistol goes off in the dark. When the light brightens, they are standing in two rows with their faces towards the back of the stage. In the centre lies* CLOCK, *dead as a doorknob. Everyone goes inside. The clock strikes outside and becomes quiet. Clock-face gets up and takes out the mask from his face. One is surprised to find that it is the old man.* OM *laughs aloud looking at the mask. The stage becomes dark.*)

Writers Workshop

WRITERS WORKSHOP was founded in 1958. It consists of a group of writers who agree in principle that English has proved its ability, as a language, to play a creative role in Indian literature, through original writing and transcreation. Its task is that of defining and substantiating the role by discussion and diffusion of creative writing and transcreation from India, the Commonwealth, and other English-using countries.

Discussions are held on Sunday mornings at 162/92 Lake Gardens, Calcutta 700045, India, and diffusion done through a series of books issued under the WORKSHOP imprint. Since 1971 the WORKSHOP has laid special emphasis on its publishing programme. A complete, descriptive checklist of more than 1000 publications is available on request.

The WORKSHOP is non-profit and non-political. It consists of writers sympathetic to the ideals and principles embodied in creative writing; it is concerned with practice not theorising, helpful criticism not iconoclasm, the torch not the sceptre.

The WORKSHOP publishes an annual book-magazine, *The New Miscellany*, devoted to creative writing. It is not a house journal; as a rule it gives preference to experimental work by young and unpublished writers, its two chief criteria for selection being high imaginative awareness and mature technique. Established writers appear in its pages if their work meets those standards. *The New Miscellany* does not carry advertising.

One can become a member or an Associate by written application to the Secretary, which requires the support of two members and approval by majority on committee. Members are writers with published work to their credit. To be an Associate requires agreement with the aims and objects of WRITERS WORKSHOP, active interest in creative writing, and a willingness to lend practical assistance to WORKSHOP activities. Subscription to *The New Miscellany* automatically confers Associate membership. Further details are available from the Director, P. Lal, at the WORKSHOP address : 162/92 Lake Gardens, Calcutta 700045 (Phone : 46-8325 and 42-2683).

Indian Creative Writing in English

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WRITERS WORKSHOP is a small non-profit and non-political publishing house devoted to Indian creative writing in English. WRITERS WORKSHOP books are published by P. Lal from 162/92 Lake Gardens, Calcutta 700 045, India. Telephone : 46-8325. A descriptive checklist of over 1000 books of poetry, fiction, criticism, drama and transcreation, and literary cassettes, is available on request.

ABSURD PLAY

J. P. Das

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL ORIYA

A
Writers
Workshop
Publication

J. P. DAS

Dr. Jagannath Prasad Das, poet, playwright and short-story writer, was born in Orissa in 1936 and was educated in the Universities of Utkal and Allahabad. His publications in English include *First Person*, *Love is a Season*, *Timescapes*, all collections of poems; *Before the Sunset*, and *The Underdog* and *Two Plays*, plays; *The Magic Deer* and *The Forbidden Street*, collections of short stories. The plays have been widely translated into various Indian languages and performed on stage and radio and television and have received critical acclaim. *Before the Sunset* is considered a classic in Indian drama. A Homi Bhabha Fellow with a doctorate in Art History, scholarly works on Orissan art include *Puri Paintings* and *Chitra-pothi*. He gave up a successful career in the Indian Administrative Service to devote himself to full-time research and creative writing. He was a Consultant to the Festival of India in the USA and France 1985-86 and has served on the Jury for national and international film festivals. A Member of the Executive Council of the Children's Film Society, India, he has edited a book on *Films for Children*. He works and lives in New Delhi.

DEDICATION

for

RAJINDER PAUL

"If only you kept on good terms with time," said the Mad Hatter, "he'd do almost anything you liked with the clock."

Alice in Wonderland

Act One

*(When lights come, one sees a bare stage with a few stools scattered about. The old man—*OM*—moves about, sitting for a while on a stool and moving away again, as if unhappy with the seat. He now shuts his eyes and appears to be meditating. A good deal of time passes. The old man is now sleeping.*

A *middle aged man—*MAM*—comes. He sits next to* OM. *Checks up whether* OM *is alive or dead. He speaks out to him loudly.)*

MAM

Excuse me, Sir.

(OM *does not reply.* MAM *repeats his question a little louder.* OM *is silent.* MAM *places his watch near* OM's *ears.* OM *now gets up with a start.)*

OM

What time is it now ?

MAN

Twentyfive minutes.

OM

Twentyfive minutes past which hour ?

MAM

How can I say ? My watch does not have the hour hand.

OM

How do you find out the time then ?

MAM

Finding out the minutes only is fine for me. Like for some people knowing the hour is enough. When you ask for the time some would say, twenty five minutes past four. No one says, it is twentyfive minutes past four o'clock on the seventeenth day of the month of August in the year nineteen hundred and seventynine. Certain things are said, the rest are understood. Even if my watch had an hour hand, how would you know if it was the time of the day or the night ?

OM

But then what time is it now ?

MAM

Twenty-five minutes and thirty seconds.

OM

But you said just now . . . .

MAM

Thirty-one seconds.

OM

That means . . .

MAM

Thirty-two seconds.

OM

Oh, no. I meant . . .

MAM

Thirty-three seconds.

OM

I mean to say . . .

MAM

Thirty-four seconds.

OM

You can't be . . .

MAM

Thirty-four seconds.

OM

How can that be ?

MAM

Thirty-four seconds; thirty-four seconds. Because my watch has stopped ! (*The clock strikes outside.*)

OM

How will you know the time then ?

MAM

Why is it necessary to know the time ? (*They are busy talking and miss the chiming of the clock. The clock, however, keeps chiming for some time after they have stopped talking.*)

OM

If you don't need to know the time, why do you carry a watch ? Now look at me. I am very conscious of time and that is why I do not carry a watch.

MAM

If you are so particular about time, then tell me what hour the clock now struck outside.

OM

I didn't pay attention. But even if I had, it would not have helped. As your watch has no hour hand, the clock has no chime to tell about the minutes.

MAM

You are a strange fellow, indeed. You carry no watch, but want to know about the time. This is like having your legs in two boats. Or else, hunting with the hounds and running with the rabbits.

OM

You don't understand me. I don't want to know about fixed time or current time. I want to know about absolute time—because the phenomena of electrodynamics as well as of mechanics possess no properties corresponding to the idea of absolute rest.

MAM

I don't think I got you right. Could you please repeat ?

(OM, *however, shuts his eyes and goes off to sleep.* MAM *hovers around him for some time and then goes over and sits on a stool a little away from him. A girl, let's call her* G-I, *comes inside.*)

G-I

(*to* MAM) When will the train come ?

MAM

What train ?

G-I

Aren't you waiting for the train ?

MAM

No. I was simply taking a walk. I didn't even know that this is a railway station.

G-I

Did you meet anyone else here ?

MAM

Was someone expected ?

G-I

Yes. (*Looks at her watch*) He should have been here by now. (*Whispers to* MAM) We are eloping.

MAM

Where will you go to ?

G-I

Don't know. We have simply decided to get on the train and get off wherever we feel like. But he should have come quite some time back.

MAM

(*Points at* OM) Is that your man ? (G-I *goes over and closely looks at the sleeping old man.*)

G-I

Could have been. But he has no sense of time. Has come forty years too late.

MAM

What will you do now ?

G-I

I'll wait. I only hope the train does not arrive before he does.

MAM

If you don't mind . . .

G-I

No, thank you. I want to have a little quiet now.

MAM

I only wanted to know who you are, who that other man is and . . .

G-I

That' something personal.
(*She walks away and sits at a distance.*)

MAM

(*to himself*) It looks as if my work will not get done. If one is mad, the other refuses to talk.

(*A young man*—YM—*comes. He looks hesitant and a little scared. He looks about him and stands as if not knowing what to do.* MAM *goes to G-I and whispers*)

MAM

He has come.

G-I

Who has come ?
(MAM *points at the young man.*)

G-I

No, he is not my man.
(*She takes out a photograph from her purse and compares.*)
No, he is not my man at all. Please do not bother me now.
(G-I *starts reading a book.* MAM *comes away from the girl and goes near the young man.*)

MAM

So what brings you here ?

AM

Sixty per minute.

MAM

(*to himself*) That's strange ! Everyone is talking about time. Is this a watch repair shop ?
(*Another person enters now. He has a mask on his face, a mask shaped like the face of a clock, except that the dial has no hands. Let's call him clockface or simply* CLOCK.)

CLOCK

Is it the right place ?

MAM

Yes, it is. The repair-man is sleeping over there. (*Points at* OM)

(CLOCK *goes and wakes up* OM. OM *gets np with a start and looks at his face. Standing at a distance* MAM *tries to overhear their conversation.*)

OM

No, I don't understand it even now.

CLOCK

What's that again ?

OM

Time. What is time. How is it that a moment of Brahma's life is sixty thousand years on the earth? But why should I be talking to you about this ? You are a big zero; a cipher. Like your face. Someone has the minute hand and someone has the chime. But you have neither. You have only a mask.

CLOCK

You mean this is not your house ?

OM

I am waiting.

CLOCK

Since how long ? For whom ?

OM

How do I know ? What do I know of time ? And then, how will he come unless it is time for him to come ?

CLOCK

Who will come ?

OM

Unless he comes and I see him, how do I know who it is ? That is why I am keen to know the correct time.

CLOCK

In that case, I think I have come to the wrong place.

OM

It is quite possible that this is the right place, but you have come at the wrong time. Either before time . . .

CLOCK

Does it mean that the party has not started ?

OM

Or after time.

CLOCK

Does it mean that the party is over ?

OM

So long as you are not in the party, how does it matter if you are early or late ? (OM *goes to his seat, lies down and goes off to sleep.*)

YM

(*to* MAM) Excuse me, Sir, may I bother you for a minute ?

MAM

What is it now ? Sixty minutes per second, isn't it ?

YM

No, Sir, it's sixty words.

MAM

How do you mean ? A minute has sixty words and not sixty seconds ?

YM

That's right, Sir. Sixty words per minute. A word a second. (*It strikes seven outside.*)

MAM

It struck seven. Does it mean seven seconds or seven words ?

CLOCK

May be the party is over.

YM

Excuse me, Sir, but I only wanted to say that I can type sixty words a minute. (*It strikes one.*)

CLOCK

(*anxious*) It is getting late every minute. (*To* MAM) Are you sure that this is not the fancy dress party ?

MAM

Do we look like people in fancy dress ?

CLOCK

Why not ? You look like a modern day middlee aged man, but you may be the magic deer from the *Ramayana.* You are in the fancy dress of a middle-aged man.

MAM

(*pointing to* YM) And him ?

YM

Let me introduce myself. I am in reality a robot from an American science-fiction film. I am here in answer to an advertisement in the newspaper, in the garb of an unemployed

young man who has done a shorthand-typing-secretarial course and can type sixty words a minute.

MAM

(*to* CLOCK) And pray, what is your disguise ?

CLOCK

(*whispers*) Shh! Don't tell anyone that I have come disguised as Time.

MAM

How can that be ? You don't even wear a wristwatch !

CLOCK

That's the real secret. What fun is a disguise otherwise ? Please, Sir, look at yourself. Who can say that you are a golden deer ? You have changed your voice too with your disguise. Though you are now seated, I know that you can easily stand up on your two legs and start walking like a man. And looking at you, no one—not even Ravana himself—can know who you really are !

(*When he is talking,* YM *is taking notes.* CLOCK *looks at him now.*

And this young man . . .

YM

Yes, sir. The last line : though you are now seated, comma, I know that you can easily stand up on your two legs and start walking like a man, full stop. And looking at you, comma, no one, dash, not even Ravana himself, dash, can know who you really are, exclamation mark.

CLOCK

You know nothing.

YM

I know everything, Sir. You, Sir, are my provider. You

are the one who put in the ad. All this was a test for me. But I am sure, Sir, that I have noted down everything correctly.

(YM *gets a hold on* CLOCK's *feet.* CLOCK *tries to pull out, but* YM *holds faster. Seeing no way out . . .*)

CLOCK

All right. Take down now . . .

(YM *leaves him and opens his note book to write. In the meantime,* CLOCK *runs out.*)

MAM

You let him go ?

YM

I know, my lord and master. It is you who was taking my test. You are my provider. You know everything, Sir.

MAM

I know nothing. I do not even know why in a pack of cards the king of diamonds, the jack of hearts and the jack of spades have one eye each when all others have two !

YM

I know, Sir.

MAM

No, I am no magic deer. Bat we can come to some terms. As a matter of fact I need a secretary as much as you need a provider. Can you handle everything right ?

YM

You've seen proof of it already.

MAM

All right. Take down now. (*Dictates slowly*) The phenomena of . . .

(YM *does not write.* MAM *waits for him to write.*)

YM

Please continue, Sir.

MAM

Please read out what you have written.

YM

The phenomena of electrodynamics as well as of mechanics possess no properties corresponding to the idea of absolute rest.

MAM

All right. All right. That'll do. I wanted someone like you. Come closer.
(YM *comes and sits near him.*)
After having seen you, I am hopeful of completing the work in six months.

YM

(*Takes out a card from his pocket and having a close look at it*) Which means we have to finish it by the Seventeenth February, Sunday.

MAM

What is that ?

YM

That is an eternal calendar. You can find out any date from 1752 A.D. from this calendar.

MAM

I employ you from this very minute. I am sure you'll be a great help to me. Who do you think I am ?

YM

Whatever else you may be, I am certain you are a playwright.

MAM

(*surprised*) How did you guess ?

YM

The seriousness with which you quoted Einstein convinced me that the quotation had made a tremendous appeal to you and that you were going to use it in your next play.

MAM

You are right. I am a playwright. I am going to write a new play in six months' time.

YM

What will be the subject of the play ?

MAM

It will be about a playwright who is on the lookout for a suitable plot to write a play, and wandering about, has finally landed himself in a strange place.

YM

I follow you perfectly, Sir.

MAM

When the playwright, who is a middleaged man and whom we may call MAM in the play, arrives, he finds only an old man sitting there. Now start taking down. Act One. Within brackets. When lights come, one sees a bare stage with a few stools scattered about. The old man—OM—moves about, sitting for a while on a stool and moving away again as if unhappy with the seat. He now shuts his eyes and appears to be meditating. A good deal of time passes. The old man is now sleeping. A middleaged man—MAM—comes. He sits next to OM. Checks up whether OM is alive or dead. He speaks out to him loudly. Bracket closed. MAM : Excuse me, sir. Within brackets : OM does not reply. MAM repeats his question a little louder. OM is silent. MAM places his

watch near OM's ears. OM now gets up with a start. Bracket closed. OM : What time is it now ? MAM : Twentyfive minutes. Did you take down all that correctly ? Now read out what you have written down.

YM

Let me read out the last portion only. Within brackets. YM opens his notebook to take dictation. In the meantime, CLOCK runs out. Bracket closed. MAM : You let him go, question mark. YM: I know, comma, my lord and master, full stop. It is you who was taking my test, full stop. You are my provider, full stop. You know everything, comma, sir, full stop. MAM I know nothing, full stop. I do not even know why in a pack of cards the king of diamonds, comma, the jack of hearts and the jack of spades have one eye each when all the others have two, exclamation mark. YM: I know, comma, sir, full stop. MAM No, comma, I am no magic deer, full stop. But we can come to some terms, full stop. As a matter of fact I need a secretary as much as you need a provider, full stop. Can you handle everything right, question mark.

MAM

That is perfect. You fully understand what I want. Your job is to write down correctly what the playwright is seeing, that is, what I am seeing.

YM

But that won't solve your problem. Even if I write down all that has happened so far, the last portion will be : MAM gives dictation to YM. There will be nothing to write thereafter. And having written all that, the script will have a running time of not more than ten minutes.

MAM

You are right. What would you suggest then ?

YM

We have to create events. We have to create a story out of the characters who come here.

MAM

But nothing seems to be happening here. That girl over there is here for quite some time, but is sitting quiet. The old man is mad and his ramblings do not make any sense. The clock-face has also gone away.

YM

Don't you worry, Sir. Things will happen. If nothing happens on its own, I have this too. (*He brings out a pistol from his pocket and gives it to* MAM)

MAM

(*surprised and afraid*) Who are you ? Come out with the truth now. Where did you get the pistol from ?

YM

Whatever I had told you is the truth. The absolute truth. I came to you in search of a job. It is up to you to keep me with you or not.

MAM

Out with the truth. Or else I will shoot you dead.
(*Excited,* MAM *aims the pistol at* YM)

YM

It's no use. There is no bullet in the pistol.

MAM

(*relieved now*) Then it is all right. (*He puts the pistol in his pocket.*) I have complete trust in you.

YM

What a strange world ! When I told you the truth, you did not believe me, but when I told you a lie, you believed me.

At least that made you relaxed. In my relationship with you, I will try to see that you keep relaxed and never get excited.

MAM

But are there bullets in the pistol ?

YM

It depends on you. If you would not get excited if there are bullets in the pistol, then there are bullets. If you do not get relaxed unless there are no bullets in the pistol, there are no bullets.

MAM

But are there bullets in the pistol in fact, or not ?

YM

As I said, it depends on whether you are relaxed or excited. If relaxed, there are bullets ; if excited, there are no bullets.

MAM

Then it is all right.

(*When they are thus engaged in conversation, a man dressed like a policeman—let's call him* POLICE—*comes in, unseen by them, and raises his pistol to them. Now they both see him.*)

Are you excited or relaxed ?

POLICE

How does it matter ?

MAM

That will tell me if your pistol has bullets or not.

POLICE

It is there.

MAM

What is there ? Excitement, relaxation or bullet ?

POLICE

The robber is hiding here and I am going to find him out.

MAM

But there does not seem to be any robber here. As you can see, we are just a few people here—we two, the old man over there, and the girl. There is no robber here. Go and look for him elsewhere.

YM

(*to* MAM) You, Sir, will bungle everything. If the policeman goes away, everything will become quiet again. What will you do with the old man and the girl ? (*To* POLICE) Well, Sir, why don't you carry out a search ? What exactly has been stolen ?

POLICE

It is not a theft. They want to hijack the plane. There was an anonymous letter. I am sure the ringleader is hiding here.
(CLOCK *comes in, looks at each of them and goes out. No one bothers about him. The clock strikes outside.* OM *wakes up with a start, runs up to* POLCE *and holds him tight. The pistol slips from his fingers.* MAM *picks up the pistol and keeps it in his pocket.*)

OM

What time is it now ?

POLICE

It is fourteen. But where is my pistol ? (MAM *is running away.* POLICE *catches him.*) I have got you this time. Yor are the ringleader. Take out the pistol and the bomb.

MAM

There is no bomb. Only two pistols. (*He aims both pistols*) Why don't you take back your pistol ?

(POLICE *is afraid of coming near him to take the pistol.*)

POLICE

Throw it to me.

MAM

Which one is your pistol ?

OM

How many minutes past fourteen is it ?

POLICE

No minutes, please. Only fourteen. (*To* OM) But why do you want to know about time ? Are you interested to know the ETD of the plane ? But the plane will not leave until I have done a thorough search of every nook and corner. It will do you no good to know the time. Come out with the truth now. Where is the bomb ?

OM

No one seems to be knowing the correct time here. (OM *turns round to go.*)

POLICE

(*to* MAM) He is trying to run away. Show him the pistol. (MAM *does not bother.* OM *goes back to his seat.*)

MAM

Which one is your pistol ? The right one or the left one ?

POLICE

Whose right ? Whose left ? Yours or mine ?

MAM

Mine.

POLICE

I mean, is it your right which is my left or is it your left which is my right ?

MAM

Yours.

POLICE

I mean . . .

MAM

Let me change the pistols to avoid all confusion.

(*He takes his hands behind and shuffles the pistols.*)

Now tell me which is your pistol ? Is it the right one or the left one.

POLICE

Yes.

MAM

What is that now ? Is it yes, the right one, or is it yes, the left one ?

POLICE

No.

MAM

Is it no, not the right one, or is it no, not the left one ?

POLICE

Yes and no.

MAM

Cut out the jokes now. You don't seem to be interested in taking back the pistol. That makes me wonder if you are really a policeman !

POLICE

(*scared now*) Quiet, please. How did you know ?

(G-I *comes and asks* POLICE)

G-I

You must be the station-master.

POLICE

No, please. I am a thief. I mean I am a policeman who catches thieves. But why do you ask ?

G-I

I have gone through the timetable twice over, but there is no stoppage of any train here.

POLICE

In that case, no train will stop here.

MAM

But you were saying that the flight will take off from this airport.

POLICE

Whether train or plane or station or airport, it won't leave if it is not scheduled in the timetable.

G-I

But I'm sure he mentioned this place. (*Another girl,* G-II, *arrives, dressed exactly like* G-I. *She does not talk to them, but sits at a distance and looks at her watch.* G-I *keeps on talking, though everyone's attention is now on* G-II.) He is very punctual. One day he was thirty seconds late reaching the park. I had given him such a dressing-down that he was never late again. Why did he get late today ? (*To herself*) Could it be that I got him wrong ? Was it eight in the morning or in the night ? Or did I mix up the name of the

station ? What if he does not come ? It will be his tragedy !
(G-I *goes back to her place. Now* POLICE *goes to* G-II.)

POLICE

(*to* G-II) Are you also looking for him ?

G-II

It is a long story.

POLICE

If you don't mind . . .

G-II

But where do I start from ?

POLICE

From the very beginning. And not so loud, please. Don't you see how everyone is trying to eavesdrop ?
(G-II *starts telling something to* POLICE *in whispers.*)

MAM

(*to* YM) Do you see how the policeman is trying to impress the girl ?

YM

That's good. You'll be able to make use of that.

MAM

But we can't hear what they are saying.

YM

We can well figure out what is going on.

MAM

What do we do sitting here ?

YM

We may discuss about relativity in the meantime.

MAM

What do you know about it ?

YM

Or else I can tell you a story. It may be of some use to you sometime. It is a story of ancient times. It is from our Indian mythology. Once Vishnu, being pleased with Narada's prayers and penance, granted him a boon.

(At this time, three persons peep in. The old man asks ; May I have a bottle of rejuvenation tablets ? The old woman asks : Is the Judge in ? And the short thin young man, whom we may call Lad, asks : May I come in ?)

MAM

Drive them out. Drive them out.

YM

No, no. They are all the better for us. We have got more characters for our play.

MAM

But I can't handle so many characters. Every playwright has a repertory in his head. For instance, Shakespeare uses a cast of about twenty characters in his plays; Tennessee Williams five or six. Beckett uses only one, or if it is two, one is a reflection of the other. As for myself, I am a playwright who can handle not more than five or six characters. How many do we have now ?

YM

Old man, girl one, policeman, girl two. That makes only four. Which means we can easily accommodate these three.

MAM

What about clock-face ?

YM

In that case you will have to include the two of us also.

MAM

That's right. I had forgotten about us. We are full and cannot take anyone else.

(*The three repeat their questions: May I have a bottle of rejuvenation tablets ? Is the Judge in ? May I come in ?*)

YM

Let's then ask them to go away.

(*He goes and stands before the three*)

OLD MAN

Have you got a bottle of rejuvenation tablets ?

YM

Out of stock.

OLD WOMAN

Is the Judge in ?

YM

Out of station.

LAD

May I come in ?

YM

(YM *comes back. Old man and old woman leave. Lad does not go.*)

YM

As I was saying, Vishnu was pleased with Narada's prayers and penance and offered him a boon.

MAM

(*not listening to him*) What did they take this for ? A chemist's shop or a court ? What does the lad want ?

(*Lad again says: May I come in ?* YM *goes to him and shouts: Out. Get out. Lad leaves and* YM *comes bqck to* MAM.)

YM

To continue my story, Narada said, Please explain to me what is Maya. This is the boon I am asking for. Are you listening to me, Sir ?

MAM

Yes. But do you think the place looks like a chemist's shop ? Do we look like patients ?

YM

Vishnu said, So be it, and asked Narada to follow him.

MAM

If you had been given a boon, what would you have asked for ? Rejuvenation tablets, justice or merely permission to come in ?

YM

I find you are a very fickle and restless person. Do listen to me carefully. Or if your mind is straying, I know how to handle it. Please take the notebook and write down what I say. That way you cannot be unmindful.

(*He gives* MAM *his notebook and starts talking as if giving a dictation.* MAM *starts writing.*)

Vishnu and Narada kept walking and finally reached a desert. Vishnu became thirsty and asked Narada to go to the village and fetch a glass of water. Narada went to the village and knocked on the door of a house. The door was opened by a very beautiful girl. Seeing this beautiful girl, Narada forgot why he had gone there. The girl's parents welcomed Narada and requested him to stay with them. Narada stayed in their house and in course of time married the girl. He devoted himself to cultivation of the land and became a family man. He had three children now. In the meantime, twelve years passed and there was a devastating flood in the village. Narada wanted to cross the flooded river and go to a safe

place. He put the youngest child on his shoulder and, taking his wife and the other two children by the hand, he started crossing the river. The young child fell from his shoulders and, trying to save him, he let go the other children. His wife and the three children were carried by the stream and drowned. Narada himself slipped and fell and became unconscious, floating on the water. When he came to his senses, he found himself on a stone surface. He remembered his wife and children and started crying. Suddenly he heard a familiar voice saying, "Where is my water, my son ? I have been waiting for an hour." Narada opened his eyes wide and saw that there was no sign of flood. The desert was shining in bright sunlight. Vishnu said, "Do you now understand what *maya* is ?"

MAM

(*closes his notebook*) Yes, I understand. Bul I still do not understand why they had come.

YM

You may use this story in the mouth of one of the characters.

MAM

Listening to your irrelevant story, we have forgotten our original story line. The policeman is still going on talking to the girl, but we do not know what it is all about.

YM

Please don't worry. I know what is going on there. Girl Two told the policeman, I loved him very dearly. And we decided to run away, take the train and get off wherever our fancy carried us.

MAM

What did the policeman say ?

YM

Policeman said, Yes, I know that. But you did a mistake by

trusting him. That fellow is unfit for you. He will not come.

MAM

What did the girl say ?

YM

Girl Two said, You are lying.

MAM

What did the policeman say ?

YM

Policeman said, All right. Remember my words. I'll take a bet with you. He won't come during the next two hours.

MAM

(*looks at* POLICE *and* G-II) They are silent now.

YM

I know. We have now to wait for two hours, the time given by the policeman.

MAM

They have been talking for so long. You finished their dialogue in a minute.

YM

Haven't you heard of relativity ? If you are sitting near a beautiful girl, two hours feel like two minutes.

MAM

(*seeing the police come towards them*) Look, the policeman is coming this side. Should we stay or run away?

YM

Leave everything to me.
(G-I *also comes to them.*)

POLICE

Didn't I tell you the truth ? It did not take even a few minutes to realise the truth.

G-I

I realised that it was an old time-table.

POLICE

But the basic question is : Does the train stop because it is written down in the time-table, or is it written down in the time-table because the train stops ? We must find out that first.

G-II

For me the basic question is whether he will come or not.

POLICE

That's right. There is a basic question to everything. (*He takes out a piece of paper from his pocket.*) I found this piece of paper in my pocket the other day. It says only : Sorry, next year. For me the basic question is : Who wrote this, which is the next year, and what will happen then ? (*The old man and the old woman appear and repeat their questions. May I have a bottle of rejuvenation tablets ? Is the Judge in ?* YM *goes up to them and says*)

YM

(*to old man*) No, Sir. (*To old woman*) Not in. And if you come across that lad, tell him that the answer is no, a plain and simple no. (*Old man and old woman leave.* G-I *comes in.*)

G-II

(*to policeman*) May I borrow your time-table ? (*Police gives the piece of paper to* G-II, *who reads it and passes it on to* G-I *who reads it and returns it to policeman. They go back.*)

POLICE

Now I know that the two girls are one and the same. One is a mirror-image of the other.

MAM

Who is whose image ? Who is the original, who is the image ?

POLICE

Both are images. Or rather, each one is an image of an image.

MAM

Is the man they are looking for also an image ?

YM

That is nice. The play could be called *Two Images in Search of an Image.*

MAM

But I had thought of *A Playwright in Search of Six Characters.*

YM

(*to* POLICE) What do you suggest ?

POLICE

The basic question is : Would you write a play basing on a title, or would you give tbe title basing on the play ? What is the time now ?

MAM

You seem to be interested in time like the old man. He is asking about time since he has no work, but why do you want to know about time ?

POLICE

The basic question is . . .

YM

I know what you are going to say. You'll say : The basic question is, do you need time because you have work or do you need work because you have time ?

(*The clock strikes outside.* CLOCK *comes in.*)

CLOCK

Who needs time ?

MAM

I don't. Do you, secretary ? (YM *nods his head saying no.*) And policeman, Sir, do you need time ? (*Police also says no.*) It is the old man who needs time. I find that the older one grows, the more time he needs. And Mr. Clock, Sir, when you come back after meeting the old man, ask me again. I might need some time then.

(CLOCK *goes away from them and stands first near* G-I *and then near* G-II. *They do not look at him.* CLOCK *goes to* OM *and wakes him up.* OM *gets up with a start.*)

OM

Who is that ? Who is that ?

(CLOCK *bends his head and salutes.*)

So, you are back again.

CLOCK

You want time ?

OM

Where will you get time from ? You are a big zero.

CLOCK

Everything starts from zero.

OM

Then tell me what time it is now.

CLOCK

I will tell you now.
(*The clock strikes outside, with irregular chimes.*)

OM

What time is it ?

CLOCK

You disturbed me and I could not count the hours. Perhaps it was . . .

OM

I don't want any guesses. I want the absolutely correct time. How many hours, how many minutes, how many seconds, and how many sixtieth part of seconds. Can you tell me ?

CLOCK

You bungled everything.

OM

You are a cheat. A long-winded busybody. Never again come to me.

CLOCK

You bungled everything.

OM

Go away, I say. Otherwise, I will tie you up.

CLOCK

Can you catch me ever ? Try . . .
(CLOCK *starts running and feinting.* OM *runs after him. For some time* CLOCK *stands between* G-I *and* G-II. OM *does not see him and turns back.*)

CLOCK

(*shouts*) I am here. Catch me.

(OM *runs after him, but he easily evades him and runs out of the stage.* OM *goes back to sleep.*)

MAM

But what is the time ?

YM

(*Takes out the calendar from his pocket*)
Thirtieth April will be a Sunday.

MAM

So what ?

YM

You can know everything from this eternal calendar. For instance, you can know that twenty-ninth April will be a Saturday and thirty-first April a Monday.

MAM

But the question is *now*. What hour is it now ?

POLICE

So you want to know the time. All right ? Now see . . .
(*He blows on his whistle. Everyone waits as if something is going to happen. Nothing happens for a couple of minutes. Angry,* POLICE *blows on his whistle twice more. Everyone waits, but nothing happens.* POLICE *looks at his whistle angirly.*)

YM

Everyone has failed. No one knows anything about time. (*To* MAM) Would you please read out that quotation about time ?

MAM

(*reads out from his note-book*) The passage of time is merely a feature of our consciousness and has no objective physical significance. Thus past, present and future have the value of

mere illusion. Einstein said that.

YM

Now we understand everything.

MAM

Shall I read some more ?

YM

Please.

MAM

St. Augustine said : There are three times—a present of things past, a present of things present, and a present of things future.

YM

Wonderful. Everything is crystal clear now. No one can have any doubts about time.
(POLICE *blows his whistle again.* LAD *comes and asks : May I come in ?* POLICE *looks at his whistle with great satisfaction.*)

MAM

(*to* YM) Should we call him in ?

YM

Yes, we should. We are already short of one character.

MAM

Did the old man pop off ?

YM

No. But we know that the two girls are one and the same.

MAM

(*goes to* LAD) Please come in, Sir. Please do.
(POLICE *goes up and looks at* LAD's *face with great satisfaction.*)

YM

(*to* LAD) What do you know about all this, Sir ?

LAD

(*whispers*) Hickory, Dickory, Dock.

MAM

I can't hear you.

LAD

(*shouts*) Hickory Dickory Dock.
(*The old man wakes up with a start.* G-I *and* G-II *come and* hold LAD *by his hands. The light fades.*)

G-I & G-II

We've got him. We've got him.

POLJCE

Didn't I tell you he would come within two hours ?

G-I

But this one looks darker.

G-I

Also shorter.

G-I

His nose is smaller.

G-II

His ears larger.

G-I

Hair too thin.

G-II

Lips too thick.

G-I

Weighs more.

G-II

Sees less.

O-I & G-II

But he will do. (*To* LAD) Let's go.
(*The girls were circling* LAD *and examining him all this time. Now they hold his hands and pull him.* LAD *looks at them helpless. The light becomes dimmer.*)

G-I

He does not seem to be willing to go. (*To* LAD) What do you want ?

LAD

Hickory.

G-II

We won't leave you.

LAD

Dickory.

G-I

Come with us quietly. Or else, we will tie you up.

LAD

Dock.

G-II

No tricks now. The moment the train comes, we take you and go.
(*The girls pull him.* LAD *sulks and whines.*)

POLICE

(*to* LAD) Why are you teasing the girls ?

LAD

(*mumbles*) Hickory Dickory Dock.

POLICE

What are you people doing ? This fellow is kidnapping the girls and you are keeping quiet. Police, Police ! . . . (*The girls tug at* LAD *who whines louder. The light becomes dimmer still.*) (*To* LAD) Leave tbe girls alone. Or else, or else . . . (OM *comes and joins them. They are all now standing surrounding the Lad and the girls.*) Leave them, I say. Or else I will shoot you. (MAM *takes out the pistol from his pocket. It is quite dark now. The clock strikes.*) I will count up to three. If you don't leave them alone . . . one . . . (*He blows the whistle*) *Two* . . . (*He blows again*) Three . . . (POLICE *blows a long whistle.* CLOCK *runs into their midst. The pistol goes off in the dark. When the light brightens, they are standing in two rows with their faces towards the back of the stage. In the centre lies* CLOCK, *dead as a doorknob. The stage becomes dark.*)

Act Two

(When lights come, one finds the stage as before. Clockface gets up slowly and takes out the mask from his face. One is surprised to find that it was YM *under the mask !)*

YM

(gets up and stands erect) How did you like my acting ?

MAM

Are you really an actor ?

YM

No, I am a critic. But every review that I do is a bit of acting.

MAM

What about being my secretary ?

YM

That was acting too. Everything is acting. That old man is acting as if asleep, but is keeping an eye on everything going on here. The thief is acting the policeman. The girl is doing a double role. A dead man is playing the clock. Do you know what you are acting ?

MAM

I am a playwright.

YM

I know. You are a conventional playwright but trying to act like a modern playwright writing absurd plays.

MAM

Where did I go wrong, Sir ?

YM

You are an Indian playwright ?

MAM

Yes, Sir.

YM

Have you read Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti ?

MAM

No, Sir.

YM

What have you read then ?

MAM

Ionesco, Adamov, Genet, Beckett.

YM

Who is your ideal ?

MAM

Vladimir.

YM

Vladimir who ?

MAM

Vladimir and Estrogon. As in : Estrogon—Well, shall we go ? Vladimir—Yes, let's go. Within brackets, they do not move.

YM

All right, all right. What is your new play about ?

MAM

It is about time.

YM

Do you know what the Atharva Veda has to say about time ?

MAM

Go, but . . .

YM

So you know about time which is from the Germanic root *ti* ? Time that goes with tide.

MAM

It was called *tima* in Old English and *timi* in Old Norse.

YM

What do you know about time ?

OM

For most purposes, the world gets its time from the sun, reckoning a day as the average interval of time from noon to noon. This is called "mean solar time". The time indicated by a sundial called "apparent solar time" does not as a rule agree with the "mean solar time", because the actual solar day is constantly changing in length owing to the shifting of the earth's position as it revolves. Mean solar time, when determined by local observation, is obviously the same only for places on the same meridian, because the sun travels 15 degrees of longitude every hour. In order to do away with such possibilities of confusion, the majority of civilised countries have established time zones roughly 15 degrees wide, throughout each of which the same time—known as standard time—is observed, so that the time of each belt will vary by an exact hour from those on either side. These belts are measured east and west from one centred on Greenwich Observatory.

YM

Is that all ?

MAM

No. Let me continue. Now let us follow the "time zone" system round the earth. When it is noon in Greenwich on, say, April 15, it is only 7 a.m. in Washington, USA; and in the time zone in which the Samoan islands lie it is midnight. That is, April 15 has just begun in Samoa. Going east from Greenwich at noon there, it is already 2 p.m. in Leningrad, and 5.30 p.m. in Madras. Shall I go on ?

YM

No, thank you. So you will write a play about time.

MAM

I have already started writing. Shall I read ? Act one. Within brackets. When lights come, one sees a bare stage with a few stools scattered about The old man—OM—moves about, sitting for a while on a stool and moving away again, as if unhappy with the seat. He now shuts his eyes and appears to be meditating. A good deal of time passes. The old man is now sleeping. A middleaged man—MAM—comes. He sits next to OM. Checks whether OM is alive or dead. He speaks out to him loudly. Bracket closed. MAM Excuse me, Sir.
(OM *gets up with a start.*)

OM

What time now ?

MAM

Twentyfive minutes.

OM

Twentyfive minutes past which hour ?

MAM

How can I say ? My watch does not have the hour hand.

OM

How do you find out the time then ?

MAM

Finding out the minutes only is fine for me. Like for some people knowing the hour is enough. When you ask for time, some would say, twentyfive minutes past four. No one says, it is twenty five minutes past four o'clock on the seventeenth day of the month of August in the year nineteen hundred and seventynine. Certain things are said, the rest are understood. Even if my watch had an hour hand, how would you know if it was the time of the day or the night ?

OM

But then what time is it now ?

MAM

Twentyfive minutes and thirty seconds.

OM

But you said just now . . .

MAM

Thirtyone seconds.

OM

That means . . .

MAM

Thirtytwo seconds.

OM

Oh, no, I meant . . .

MAM

Thirty-three seconds.

OM

I mean to say . . .

MAM

Thirty-four seconds.

OM

You can't be . . .

MAM

Thirty-four seconds.

OM

How can that be ?

MAM

Thirty-four seconds; thirty-four seconds. Because my watch has stopped !
(*The clock strikes outside,* CLOCK *comes in and moves about.*)

OM

What time is it now ?

MAM

Eighteen.

OM

But how many minutes past eighteen ?

MAM

I don't know. Please go away.
(OM *goes away.* CLOCK *follows him and sits near him.*)

YM

It struck fourteen. Why did you tell him eighteen ?

MAM

It does not matter. Fourteen or eighteen, all that the old man wants is a number. Well, what was I saying now ?
(POLICE, *who was listening to them, comes closer now.*)

POLICE

It was about the play you have already started writing.

YM

What happens in the end ?

MAM

The first act ends in a murder. In the second half the solution is found. The question is : Who killed time ?

POLICE

But the basic question is, where is the murder weapon ?
(MAM *takes out the pistol and gives it to* YM. YM *examines it.* POLICE *asks for the pistol but when* YM *hands it over to him, takes it not in his hand, but on a handkerchief, and puts the pistol wrapped in the handkerchief in his pocket.*)
So we have the weapon. Now for the dying declaration. The question is, what did the clock say before death ?

MAM

I have not heard anything.

POLICE

That can't be. All of you come here.
(G-I *and* G-II *come nearer.* CLOCK *goes on pacing.*)
What did he say when he fell down after being shot?

G-I

He said, I don't want *time*. (*Emphasises "time"*)

G-II

No. He said, I *don't want* time.
(*Emphasises "don't want"*)

POLICE

Who does that point to as the murderer ? If he said, I don't want *time*, then the murderer is someone, and if he said, I *don't want* time, then the murderer is someone else.

MAM

But both point to the old man only. It is the old man who was so concerned with time. The deceased talking about time is pointing his accusing finger at the old man.

POLICE

So now, we have the murder weapon. We have the dying declaration. We also have the murderer.

YM

No, sir. Though the evidence leads to the old man, the real murderer is someone else. (*The clock outside strikes.* CLOCK *goes out.*)

MAM

Yes, sir. The murderer is someone else. And that murderer is (*to* YM) you. It is your pistol. It is your fingerprint on the pistol. How can we forget that it was you who had first pulled out the pistol ?

YM

Patience, please. Please have patience. Please think of everything before you judge a person. It was not I only who had a pistol. The policeman also had a pistol. And with what finesse he took my fingerprints on the pistol ! When he took the pistol in his handkerchief, I knew who the murderer was. And then, I have my doubts if this fellow is a policeman. First he said something about catching a thief. That was only a ploy to gain entrance. After that he tried to accuse the old man. But then, truth triumphed in the end.

POLICE

Ladies and gentlemen. May I have your attention, please. I may not be a policeman. I may even be a thief. But I am no murderer. Frankly, I have been suspicious of the middleaged man from the start. This was the man who was waxing eloquent about time. And the strongest evidence against him is that he had the murder weapon on him. The murder was committed, not with the pistol which I have, but with the one in this gentleman's pocket. (*To* MAM) Out with the pistol, now!

MAM

No. No . . .

G-I

We knew that he was the murderer.

G-II

He who can split a character in two is capable of anything.

YM

What does that mean ?

G-I

It is against the tradition of theatre to show two similar characters in a play. In this play a character has been split into two and given to us. Not just that. We have been given similar dress, dialogue and character. This confuses the audience. Even the policeman was confused.

G-II

Secondly, we have hardly any role in the play. There has to be a balance between male and female characters in a play. This play does not have it. Most of the time we have just to hang around doing nothing. For instance, I have already read the timetable twice, having nothing else to do.

G-I

Thirdly, we do not have much of movement on the stage. We are made to wait for someone, who does not turn up. And so we had in the end to catch hold of the funny fellow.

G-II

Fourthly . . . (*She mimes making a speech.*)

G-I

Fifthly . . . (*Mimes talking in a more agitated manner.*)

G-II

Sixthly . . . (*Mimes a still more excited speech.*)

MAM

Patience, my dear ladies and gentlemen, have patience. I have a lot to say about the accusations made against me, but I choose to keep quiet. I am indeed unfortunate. I am unfortunate to have been born in a country where the readers are blind, the audience is illiterate, and the critics are idiots. Rather than suffer such foolishness, I consider it more respectable to confess to the murder. You will be happy to know, ladies and gentlemen, that after due deliberation, I have decided to announce that I committed the murder.

YM

That is impossible. I must take responsibility for my action. The murder is mine and mine only. I have committed it singlehanded. Or to put it differently, I have committed suicide without anyone's aid or abetment. Milord and gentlemen of the jury, you cannot hang a person for someone else's crime. It is my pistol, it is my fingerprint and, what is more, it is my corpse. It is only I who is responsible for the crime, only I. I am prepared for the severest sentence.

POLICE

May I say something in this connection, milord ?

YM

If you are particular about the dying delcaration or suicide note, I am prepared even now to record a statement that I committed the crime while in complete possession of my wits.

POLICE

Milord, I am an impostor and a liar. But I want to tell you the truth before I breathe my last. Milord, I am not a policeman. As a matter of fact, no one of our family has been in the police for seven generations. I am a great sinner. But I do not want anyone to be punished for my crime. Please punish me on my statement. Let truth triumph.
(*The clock strikes.* CLOCK *comes in, goes around, and then goes out.* YM *comes to them.*)

OM

What time is it now ?
(*No one listens to* OM. *They continue as before.*)

G-I

This only shows how two lies make one truth. Though you have all tried to arrive at a conclusion with your half-baked arguments, you have all missed a basic premise. What is it that a murder presupposes ? It presupposes a murderer. It presupposes a man to be murdered. It also presupposes a murder weapon. But more than these, a murder presupposes another important thing.

G-II

And that is the motive. You can have a murder without a murderer. You can have a murder without having to kill a man. But the thing without which no murder is possible is motive.

G-I

And therefore we have to ask . . .

OM

What time is it now ?

G-I

What is it that motivated the murder ? Who is it that gains by the murder ? Once that question is answered, catching the murderer is but child's play.

OM

But we must know the correct time too.

G-II

Motives for a murder can be of three types: for money, for woman or for fame. There are instances of murder for one or more of these reasons. There could be a murder for money and woman, or for woman and fame, or for money and fame.

G-I

The murder under our consideration is one which combines all three elements. OM to put it differently, it is a case where two and two make four.

OM

But then what can you do if you don't know what time ii is ?

MAM

It is now evident from all that the real murderers are these two girls. That is the final truth.
(*Since no one listens to* OM, *he goes away.*)

G-II

It is as true as the sun rising in the east. Or Jack and Jill going up the hill.

G-I

Or happy days are here again.

MAM

And they must be tried and suitably punished. I am willing to be the prosecutor and produce all the evidence.

YM

I am willing to be the judge. You will reall that the old woman was asking for the judge, that is me.

POLICE

For a fair trial, I would like to be the defense counsel.
(*They rearrange the seats as in a courtroom.*)

YM

Silence, silence ! The court is now in session. Let the prosecution present its case.

MAM

May it please your honour. To present this serious matter, I must begin from the very beginning. You may ask, which is the beginning ? According to the Book of Genesis in the Bible, God made the earth, the heavens and the planets and then formed man of the dust of the ground and placed him in the Garden of Eden. Watered by a river and abounding in trees and fruit and food, Eden was a garden of delight. Animals and birds, formed out of the ground, were added, were named by Adam, the man God had created, and lived peaceably in the Garden. Then, as a companion for Adam, woman was made from a rib taken from his side when he was in a deep sleep, and the two lived together in a state of perfect happiness and innocence.

POLICE

Objection, milord. This is a denigration of the character of woman.

YM.

There is no such thing as character of woman. Objection

overruled. You may proceed, Mr. Prosecutor.

MAM

In the garden stood the Tree of Knowledge whose fruit was forbidden to Adam and Eve. This fruit the woman Eve was tempted to eat by the serpent, more cunning than any beast of the field, and Adam also fell into temptation and ate the fruit. Then the eyes of both were opened; they lost their innocence and gained knowledge of good and evil. As a punishment for sin, or disobedience to God . . .

POLICE

Objection . . .

YM

Overruled. Please continue.

MAM

They were turned out of Eden; the serpent was cursed, the woman condemned to the pains of childbirth.

POLICE

Ob—

OM

Over—

MAM

And made subject to man and the man compelled to toil for his food from that time onwards. (*The clock strikes.* OM *wakes up with a start and comes to them.*)

OM

What time is it now ?

(*No one listens to him. He tries to listen to them for some time but gets bored and goes back to his seat.* MAM *continues his speech. However, one sees only his mouth moving without any voice coming out. He continues his mime when the clock strikes outside.*)

POLICE

Objection, milord.

YM

Objection overruled. (*To* MAM) Please continue.
(MAM *continues his mime of making a strong speech. Agitated,* POLICE *mimes a protest. The girls also join the act and, equally agitated, mime a strong statement. It appears as if there is a serious difference of opinion.*)

YM

Order. Order.

POLICE

Milord, I have no faith in this court.

YM

If doubts are cast on the fairness of the trial and the impartiality of the court, I would not like to continue as the judge.

POLICE

In that case I don't mind being the judge and conducting the trial.

MAM

But how can a party to the case sit in judgment ? Against my wishes, and only in the interest of a fair trial, I am willing to take up the responsibility.

YM

You too have been a party. What fairness can be expected from you ? How can the prosecutor be the judge ?

POLICE

In that case the choice narrows down to the girls.
(*The girls go to the Judge's seat. They rearrange the seats.*)

G-I & G-II

Order. Order.
(LAD *enters. He behaves as if he is the lord and master of the whole show.*)

LAD

Please hold on for a minute. I thlnk the microphones are not working. (*Looks at the cabin*) Tone up the sound a little. Testing. Testing. One two three four five. (*His voice comes out very loud on the speaker*) A little lower, please, Five four three two one. O. K. Now for the lights. Make it a little brighter. (*It becomes brighter*) Not so much. Dim it a bit. That's better. Now get along with the dialogue.
(LAD *goes out*.)

G-I & G-II

Order. Order.

MAM

Milord. Listening to the evidence of the prosecution witnesses and the presentation of the public prosecutor, anyone will think that there is no criminal more wicked and vile than the accused. But, milord, this is a case which stands out as an example of twisting the truth beyond recognition through falsehood. I will produce one single proof of this, which will make the case take a complete turn. That proof lies in the public prosecutor's pocket. Public prosecutor, sir, will you please come to the dock ?

POLICE

I swear that I will tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

MAM

What are you really ?

POLICE

To be truthful, I am a liar.

MAM

If you are a liar, then your statement that you are a liar is a lie. That makes you a truthful person. If you are a truthful person, then your statement that you are a liar is true. That makes you a liar. Which is the truth ? The lie is the truth or the truth is the truth ?

POLICE

Truth is lie.

MAM

If truth is lie, then what is lie ? Contrarily, if lie is truth, then what is truth ?

POLICE

Lie is truth.

G-I & G-II

Order. Order.

MAM

Let me now come to the material object. (*To* POLICE) What have got in your pocket ? (POLICE *takes out the whistle and blows on it.*) What else have you got ?

POLICE

Nothing else.

MAM

(*whispers*) That piece of paper.

POLICE

(*takes out the piece of paper*) Yes, sir, this piece of paper.

MAM

Please read out what is written.

POLICE

(*Reads*) Sorry, next year.
(*Gives the piece of paper to* MAM)

MAM

(*tries to decipher it*) Miiord, please note how witness is trying to mislead the court. The paper says, not "Sorry, next year", but "Sonny, nasty car". Let this he taken into the court's records. What other spoof is necessary ?
(LAD *enters*)

MAM

What happened now ? My dialogue is all right. Except that I said spoof instead of proof. Everything else was all right.

LAD

No, after the first court scene, everything seems confused. And there is a lot of repetition. We have to make changes.
(LAD *sits down. Others sit surrounding him.* OM *does not move and keeps sleeping.* POLICE *looks inside and calls Clock-face who comes and joins them.*)

LAD

Is everybody there ?

MAM

Except the old man.
(*The clock strikes.*)

LAD

Doesn't matter. He has nothing to do except enquire about the time. How long did it take to do the First Act ?

POLICE

The old man was keeping time. About forty minutes.

LAD

How many minutes of the Second Act have we done by now ?

POLICE

About half an hour.

LAD

Which means we need another ten-fifteen minutes of play. We have to decide about the end,

G-I

That's why I had suggested doing *The Twins*.

LAD

Thank heavens, no. Let's be done with this play first. Let me have the script. (MAM *passes on his notebook to him.*) How far have we gone ?
(MAM *points out the page.*)
Order. Order. Then there are ten pages of court scene. It will get boring. We must have a strong climactic ending as in the First Act.
(*The lights dim.*)
What follows the court scene ?
(MAM *shows him the page. Lad looks closely as it is difficult to read in the dim light.*)
This is the end of Act One.
What about the finale of the play ?

MAM

Both end in a similar manner.

LAD

How can that be ?

G-II

That's why I had suggested doing *The Twins*.

LAD

We have no time now. Let's cut out ten minutes from the court scene and do the last portion. Get back to your respective places.
(*They line up as in the end of Act One. The girls hold* LAD'*s hands and pull him.* LAD *sulks and whines.*)

POLICE

(*to* LAD) Why are you teasing the girls ?

LAD

(*mumbles*) Hickory Dickory Dock.

POLICE

What are you people doing ? This fellow is kidnapping the girls and you are keeping quiet ? Police, Police . . .
(*The girls tug at* LAD *who whines louder. The light become dimmer still.*)
(*to* LAD) Leave the girls alone. Or else, or else . . .
(OM *comes and joins them. They are all now standing, surrounding the lad and the girls.*) Leave them, I say. Or else I will shoot you.
(MAM *takes out the pistol from his pocket. It is quite dark now. The clock strikes.*) I will count up to three. If you don't leave them alone . . . One (*he blows the whistle*) . . .Two . . . (*he blows again*) Three . . .
(POLICE *blows a long whistle.* CLOCK *runs into their midst. The pistol goes off in the dark. When the light brightens, they are standing in two rows with their faces towards the back of the stage. In the centre lies* CLOCK, *dead as a doorknob. Everyone goes inside. The clock strikes outside and becomes quiet. Clock-face gets up and takes out the mask from his face. One is surprised to find that it is the old man.* OM *laughs aloud looking at the mask. The stage becomes dark.*)

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Indian Creative Writing in English